



Green Scenery

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The Country's Natural Resources Are Natures Gift To Us What We Make Of Them Are Our Gift To Posterity

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Early Warning: Fears of Tension Around Foreign Investment in Oil Palm and Rubber Plantation in Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District

According to media sources and the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA), Green Scenery gathers that foreign investor Socfin Agricultural Company Sierra Leone Limited is investing 100 million US dollars in rubber and oil palm plantations in the Malen chiefdom in Pujehun District in the south of Sierra Leone. Socfin Agricultural Company Sierra Leone is a subsidiary of the Belgian corporation, Socfin.

The company has taken out a 40-year lease of 16,000 acres of prime farmland, and has high-level government support in Sierra Leone. The lease was signed "under the watchful eyes of the Minister of Agriculture and Food Security Dr. Sam Sesay". The reports don't mention how much was paid to land owners and to date there has been no public disclosure of what benefits and incentives (tax holidays, etc) may be granted to the investor.

The arrangement has already caused tension amongst key stakeholders and farmers in the area.

As an organization engaged in research on exploitation of natural resources and in recent time on large-scale investment in agriculture and land in Sierra Leone and the impact on local farmers and the environment, Green Scenery is concerned about the developments in Malen chiefdom and its ramification on Sierra Leones' fragile peace.

The Honourable Shiaka Musa Sama, (Member of Parliament, constituency 88), one of the critical voices in the debate, said in his Appeal for Intervention published in *Standard Times* (6 April 2011), that he received threats and that he filed a case at Pujehun police station which is still under investigation.

Allegations related to the investment include:

- Lack of transparency on the agreement and MOU
- Lack of consultation with all concerned and relevant stakeholders
- Lack of information given to local farmers on the short-, middle- and long-term impact of the arrangement
- Pressure on chiefs and some land owners to sign / approve the agreement
- No adequate compensation for loss of land
- Potential demolition of existing tree-crop plantations and villages
- Endangering/compromising development aid projects in the area

Green Scenery is urging the Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Sam Sesay, the Paramount Chief, Hon. P.C.B.V. Kebbie and Socfin to allow public scrutiny of the agreement as a starting point of dealing with the early warning sign of the conflict. This move will be helpful in resolving misunderstanding emerging from rumors and misinformation about the agreement on this project and the MOU, if one exists.

Concerned about the security of the environment and the people of Sierra Leone, Green Scenery declares that it is commissioning a research in the area to investigate the issues surrounding the allegations with the intention of furthering recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

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